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## The Rise and Fall of the International Organization of Journalists Based in Prague 1946-2016 : Useful recollections Part III

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# Book Reviews

Editor: Maarit Jaakkola

**Kaarle Nordenstreng**

*The Rise and Fall of the International Organization of Journalists Based in Prague 1946–2016:*

*Useful recollections Part III*

Karolinum Press, 2020, 546 pp.



The early twentieth century saw the heyday of “cultural internationalism”, the concept introduced by diplomatic historian Akira Iriye (1997), meaning cross-national cultural communication, understanding, and cooperation, and entailing that a variety of activities link countries and people through the exchange of ideas. Besides such major state-level organisations as the League of Nations, a wide variety of international organisations was founded in the early twentieth century: ideological (socialist, communist, and even fascist), religious, economic, feminist, legal – and journalistic.

The International Organization of Journalists (IOJ), founded in 1946, has its roots in this boom of international organisations of the early twentieth century. Of the many international journalist associations of the mid-war period, the legacy of the IOJ was based on the Fédération Internationale des Journalistes (FIJ), founded in 1926, and the International Federation of Journalists of Allied or Free Countries (IFJAF), established during World War II.

*The Rise and Fall of the International Organization of Journalists Based in Prague 1946–2016*, by Kaarle Nordenstreng, is a sequel to two previous volumes on the history of the IOJ published already in the 1980s. Nordenstreng, Professor Emeritus of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Tampere, Finland, and internationally renowned media scholar (and well-known character within Nordicom, centre of media and communication research at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden) started writing this third volume already in the mid-1990s, but the work did not materialise until 2020. The book begins with a chronological part partially based on previous texts about the history of the IOJ. The second part of the book includes 18 personal recollections about the IOJ. In addition, the last third of the whole book consists of various appendices including documents about the IOJ.

The founding meeting of the IOJ was held during the World Congress of Journalists in Copenhagen in 1946. The delegates

of the Congress committee who decided to establish a new international organisation included nine countries (Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, South Africa, the UK, the USA, and the USSR). In addition, another twelve countries, including Norway and Sweden, later joined the IOJ as founding members.

As in international politics, the positive post-war spirit did not last long within the IOJ. Soon after the Second IOJ Congress in Prague, Czechoslovakia, Anglo-American press reports started to accuse the IOJ of “falling under Russian influence”, with the headquarters “taken over by communists” and the organisation being a hard-line puppet of Moscow. After several clashes between Eastern and Western representatives of organisations, including walk-outs from the meetings, the IOJ split when the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) was established in Brussels in 1952. In practice, the major Western national journalist unions had withdrawn from the IOJ before the 1950s, yet there still were representatives from the UK, the USA, and Scandinavia in the Helsinki Congress of 1959.

Belonging to the “Soviet sphere” was manifested in the headquarters of the IOJ, which were situated in Prague, the capital of a socialist Eastern bloc country. Moreover, the major financing source for the IOJ was the Soviet Union. One interesting source of financing of the IOJ was the international lottery, which became an important means of fundraising for the training schools and assistance to journalists in the developing countries. Indeed, the IOJ did not consist only of the East European socialist countries (and Western countries such as Finland, France, and Italy, who all had relatively solid communist parties and trade unions); the countries from Latin America, Asia, and the Arab world had a strong position in the organisation. In that

sense, the IOJ remained – and even expanded – a truly international and global organisation. In terms of numbers, the western IFJ was less than half the size of the IOJ. In fact, the IOJ became the world’s largest international non-governmental organisation in the media field by the 1970s.

But when the Cold War was heated, the international (geo)politics had an increasingly tightening grip on the IOJ. One milestone in the development was, of course, the Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, yet the IOJ did not undergo drastic changes. Nevertheless, the promising visions of “socialism with a human face” turned to “normalisation”, also within the IOJ. Moreover, the foxholes of both sides were deepened. As Nordenstreng writes about the relationship between the IOJ and the IFJ, “No doubt the relations between the two internationals resembled a dialogue of the deaf” (p. 76).

Nordenstreng himself was the president of the IOJ from 1976 to 1990. According to his testimony, he saw strengthening “the strategy for East-West détente and North-South cooperation beyond the customary boundaries determine by the Cold War contradictions” as his main achievement as the president (p. 300). Indeed, one part of the global internationalism of the 1960s and 1970s was to export the ideologies of the rival superpowers – to spread the influence and to increase the power of both blocs – to developing nations. Training and other educational programmes were targeted to these countries, financed both by Eastern European institutions and American private philanthropic foundations (Rockefeller, Ford, etc.). In other words, “rival universalisms structured national societies as well as international relations along ideological lines”, as Sandrine Kott (2017: 361) writes in her account on Cold War internationalism.

The lingering end of the IOJ was sad in many ways – the fall of an empire. Not only did the biggest supporter, the Soviet Union, collapse, the “Velvet Revolution” of Czechoslovakia treated the IOJ as an institutional outcast because of its relationship with the former socialist regime. As Nordenstreng writes, “the IOJ became a virtual hostage of the communist system” (p. 222). After 1990, the personal relationships within the IOJ also became toxic. The immediate post–Cold War years were tough for many ex-officials of the IOJ. For instance, Finnish journalists’ unions participating in the IOJ were seen as fostering the “Finlandisation” of Finnish media during the Cold War (see, e.g., Salminen, 1999).

Nordenstreng ponders if he was a puppet of the Soviets – a “useful idiot”, according to Lenin’s well-known phrase. He admits he has suffered “from political stigma as a fellow traveller of the Soviets in my Finnish environment” (p. 230). On the other hand, he does not fundamentally regret his time as the president of the IOJ, even though the post took a lot of time and effort, often at the cost of teaching and other tasks he had as professor of journalism and mass communication. Being the head of this kind of global organisation, with the opportunity to travel and meet high-ranked politicians and other leaders, surely was an opportunity difficult to resist, especially for such an active and energetic person as Kalle was (and still is at the age of 80!). All who know him do not doubt his good intentions as an idealist who wants to develop journalism worldwide.

Accordingly, it is good to emphasise that despite the ideological essence of the IOJ

in the bipolar world, the organisation was also an important educator of journalists. It also actively highlighted the problems of journalists worldwide, especially the killing and kidnapping of journalists.

*The Rise and Fall of the International Organization of Journalists Based in Prague 1946–2016* is not a historical study of the IOJ, not even a comprehensive media organisation history, but a chronological account and review of the activities of an international organisation. The book certainly includes subjective and fragmented reflections about the history of the global journalistic organisation, but not a coherent general interpretation about the IOJ. However, the reminiscences and stories, as well as wide appendices, of the book provide fruitful material for further study. Since the Nordic media history research, particularly on the Cold War media, is very numerous and rich at the moment, this book could be standpoint for a thesis, for instance, among the Nordic media historians.

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